James Marlow

'God Have Mercy Upon Us'

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's time America took a look at itself.

When an African or Asian leader is slain it may be regarded here as the result of a society less advanced than this one. This is an American myth, as Americans have demonstrated once again.

A president and a policeman shot to death and a governor wounded in Dallas and the man charged with the crimes in turn murdered, before he got a fair trial, by a gunman who leaped through police lines to shoot him.

These crimes are a product of the American society where violence and talk of violence increase as state officials defy Federal court orders until troops are called out to stop them.

Vaunted System

Yet, supreme achievements of the Western world are supposed to be respect for law, democratic and orderly change in government, a fair trial, and freedom and protection of freedom for the individual man, no matter who he is.

If President Kennedy had been the first president killed in office, it would be awful enough.

It would mean one individual, ignoring constitutional and peaceful change in government, decided to take the law into his own hands to eliminate an elected leader.

But killing American presidents, or trying to, is now assuming the complexion of a tradition. Four have been assassinated: Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, and now Kennedy.

Sordid Series

Attempts were made on the lives of three other presidents: Jackson, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Truman. A gunman shot Theodore Roosevelt after his presidency but while he was seeking re-election.

In that same period of almost 100 years not one British prime minister was assassinated. A madman did kill a prime minister, Spencer Perceval, 151 years ago.

It can't be argued the British are basically different or that among them the percentage of lunatics or discontented are proportionately smaller. They are simply more dedicated to peaceful and orderly government.

As long ago as 1200 B.C. an Egyptian king, Ramses III, looking over his own administration of law and justice, said: "I made the land safe so that a lone woman could go on her way freely and none would molest her."

That's more than the United States can say today, 3,100 years later, even about the safety of its presidents. But the worst criminal, even the killer of a president, is entitled to a fair trial.

Even here in Washington, the nation's capital, there is growing uneasiness about walking the streets at night because of the number of people being robbed, stabbed, shot or dragged into alleys to be raped.

Adlai E. Stevenson, twice a presidential candidate and now U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, found exactly one month ago, also in Dallas, that not even a man in his position was safe from some violence on the street.